HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 107 November 12th, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

My friend, Christopher Dawson, raises in a letter an issue of fundamental importance in regard to questions recently discussed in the News-Letter, and in particular, in the Supplement on "Planning for Freedom" (C.N-L. No. 104). By what name are we to call, and in what terms are we to describe, the society which we wish to see established as an alternative to totalitarianism? The question has been perplexing some of us as well as Mr. Dawson for a long time, and I am glad that he has raised it so pointedly and called attention to the difficulties. He writes :

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE TO TOTALITARIANISM?

"I am more and more impressed with the magnitude of the problems which confront us to-day in the conflict between our culture and the totalitarian systems, and with the danger of the disintegration of British society under the pressure of total war and totalitarian propaganda. It is clear that unless we can preserve the distinctive values of our society against these adverse forces, military success against Germany would be of little value ; moreover I believe that it will only be possible to achieve military success, if we find a solution of this spiritual or ideological problem, and make our own people and the world clearly conscious of the real nature of our cause.

"The trouble is that, since our cause is not a party one and since it even transcends the national tradition, it has no ready-made label or programme. We are agreed that the spiritual values of Christianity and political, social and personal freedom are at stake. But our society is not Christian in the absolute sense, and much harm can be caused by a false identification of them. The accepted solution is to term our cause that of democracy, and a good case can be made for the use of the word, but it is not wholly satisfactory and is open to several grave objections.

"(*a*) Historically democracy is not an English tradition. English constitutionalism and parliamentarism were liberal rather than democratic, while English society was aristocratic and individualist. Modern democracy is mainly French and American, and the first modern regime —that of the Jacobins—was definitely totalitarian and suffered from many of the evils which we are opposing in the modern totalitarian states. American democracy has, of course, much more affinity with English ideals, but that is because it has been profoundly influenced by English liberalism and is, in fact, liberal democracy.

"(*b*) Morally, democracy is weak, just at the points that are most in need of defence at the present time. It involves (or at least permits) the lowering down of standards to a level which is acceptable to everybody, and it is, partly for this reason, very ready to accept a crudely materialist form of secular culture.

"(*c*) It is exposed to the danger of disintegration, owing to its lack of authority and discipline. Here England has been strong enough to survive the continental democracies and to resist totalitarian aggression, just because it was not purely democratic.

"Hence the danger that, if we accept democracy as our standard and slogan, we shall destroy the sources of our real strength, and lose the values which are an essential part of our national tradition.

" On the other hand there are obvious objections to using ' Liberalism ' and ' Liberal ' as our watch-words. They have acquired a narrow partisan character, and the associations of the words in America and on the continent are different from those which we wish to emphasize and which are in fact the real ones in this country.

" What then is the alternative ? I admit that I have found no satisfactory answer to this question, though I feel it is of vital importance that one should be found. It is absolutely necessary to assert and maintain the distinctive values of this Christian-liberal-democratic-western tradition against the totalitarian alternatives of Nazism and Communism, and to create some direct positive form of defence against the psychological offensive of totalitarianism.

" It seems to me that the danger of disintegration has increased very much since the Russian war, since it is no longer possible to make totalitarianism the direct issue of the war, and since we are being faced with the false dilemma—Communism or Nazism—which obscures the distinctive values for which we stand.

" There is, moreover, the danger of yet another alternative—a Christian totalitarianism which is liable to deceive the very elect and to confuse the issue still further. The evil of totalitarianism is not in the least exorcised by transferring totalitarianism to the religious level. On the contrary, the threat to spiritual freedom is even greater, when totalitarianism assumes a religious form or appeals to religious sanctions. I doubt whether Christians are alive to these dangers and this is not surprising since the actual menace of secular totalitarianism is so much greater. But it seems clear that we cannot resist the latter, unless we have a clear understanding of the ultimate positions that have to be defended by Christians and non-Christians alike against all forms of totalitarianism, and what are the essential conditions for the preservation of the integrity and freedom of the personality. This is where I find a difficulty not only with the Fascists and the Communists, but with the scientists on the one hand, and the more intransigent Christians on the other, not to mention the practical men, whether in the political or economical field, who inevitably tend to adopt totalitarian methods, without ideological bias, in a purely utilitarian or technical spirit. Whatever our social doctrine may be and whatever name we may call it by, the preservation of these fundamental conditions of spiritual freedom should be the primary consideration and the determining factor in our thought and action."

THE FOOD SITUATION IN BELGIUM

I have received from the Belgian Red Cross London Committee through its Vice-President, Dr. E. J. Bigwood, particulars about food conditions in Belgium. The information is based on medical reports by members of the Universities in Belgium. The facts reveal an alarming situation.

The average general diet of adults in urban centres contains only about forty per cent. of the constituents necessary to keep the body in health. The deficit is particularly serious in the case of pregnant women and nursing mothers. The small milk supplies are distributed exclusively to children under four years of age, and their case is less serious. But from three years onwards there is a deficit varying from 20 to 50 per cent., while adolescents in the critical years of growth fare no better than the average adult population. The situation is likely to become considerably worse in the coming winter. Belgium was reckoning on an economic arrangement with Russia for the import of grain, but with the entry of Russia into the war this hope has disappeared.

According to one of the reports submitted to the University in Brussels 60 per cent. of the children of school age in towns have to go without breakfast ; about one third have an inadequate mid-day meal and more than a half have to be content with an insufficient supper. The results of malnutrition are a definite increase in morbidity and infantile mortality. A survey in one of the clinics showed that among 330 children the last quarterly death rate was 15, whereas the normal figure is from 4 to 5. There are many cases of bronchial pneumonia, scurvy, anaemia and skin disturbances. It was found that of the children in kindergartens, 33 per cent. were in a definitely weak physical condition in May 1940, while the number had risen in January 1941 to 47 per cent. ; the figures for primary schools were 48 per cent. in May of last year and 63 per cent. in January of this year. There is abundant reason to fear that the health of several generations may be irremediably impaired.

We must be willing to know and honestly to face such facts. But merely to allow our feelings to be harrowed by them not only does not help but is positively harmful. The only right reaction is to try to think out the kind of action they demand. If the evils are to be remedied, so far as they can be remedied, there must be a body of people who have clear ideas about the political measures that will be required to set things right, and who understand the price that will have to be paid and are determined to pay it. We must begin to apply our minds to these questions now.

THE BIBLE TO-DAY

Facts regarding the circulation and study of the Bible are of the highest interest, both on account of their religious significance and because of the profound influence of the ideas of the Bible on the European tradition, which is to-day fiercely assailed. If the core of that tradition is to be preserved as the foundation of further moral progress, men must learn again to draw spiritual illumination and strength from the wisdom and inspiration of the Bible.

It is reported in a Swiss magazine that there has been a renewed interest in the study of the Bible in recent years in Germany among both Protestants and Roman Catholics, and a marked increase in the sale of Bibles since the Nazis came into power. According to this source, in 1933 the number of Bibles sold was 830,000. By 1939, it had risen to 1,225,000 and in 1940 had increased by a further 300,000. The increased sales probably include copies of a shortened Bible for German Christians published by the Stuttgart Bible Society. It is called a Youth and Family Bible, and the omission of some books of both the Old and the New Testaments and of parts of others appears to have been dictated partly for reasons of simplification by leaving out the parts less easy to read, and partly to get rid of passages incompatible with the Nazi attitude towards the Jews.

A graphic account of the circulation of the Bible throughout the world is given in the recently published popular report of the British and Foreign Bible Society.[1] The Society circulated last year over eleven million copies of the Scriptures.

The publication by the Oxford University Press in war time of the whole Bible in a new form for general reading and the fact that, notwithstanding the price of a guinea, more than 24,000 copies were taken up by booksellers before publication are deserving of notice. The volume is called *The Bible for To-day* and has been edited by John Stirling. The aim is to encourage a new approach to the contents of the Bible by setting them against the universal backgrounds of human life. This is achieved partly by brief prefaces to the various books, by titles, very frequent cross-headings and occasional footnotes, all of which help to bring out the connection with the life of to-day; and partly by illustrations by Rowland Hilder and other artists, which depict not the Bible scene but the companion picture which rises in the mind of the modern reader when he looks at the contents of the Bible in the way suggested. The illustrations are largely of modern cities and present-day activities, including aeroplanes and the effects of air-raids. The editor, artists and Oxford University Press are to be heartily congratulated.

FORTHCOMING BROADCAST TALKS

On November 19th and the three following Wednesdays, from 7.45 to 8.0 p.m., Professor John Macmurray will deliver four broadcast talks on "Persons and Functions". They deal with the crucial issue whether men and women are to be regarded and dealt with primarily as persons or are to be estimated chiefly by the functions which they perform in the social order. This, in Professor Macmurray's view, is substantially the same question as whether the religious or the political conception of life is to predominate in the ordering of human affairs. I do not agree with everything that John Macmurray says or writes, but he sees with unusual vividness what this difference between persons and functions involves for the future of human society. His forthcoming talks deserve to be carefully followed.

[1] *The Book of Freedom.* The Bible House, 146 Queen Victoria Street, E.C.4. 6d., post free 8d.

THE SILENT MINUTE

I have no doubt that many of you have already formed the habit of observing the Big Ben Silent Minute at nine o'clock each evening.[1] We are all conscious of our need of moments of recollection, and this observance offers an opportunity to those who listen to the nine o'clock news. I find great help in joining at that time with many hundreds of thousands of listeners throughout the world in a common act of dedication and of trust in God. The forces of evil, without and within, are so powerful, our moral and spiritual reserves as a people are so inadequate for the tasks we have to face, that faith in the power of the Spirit to renew, reanimate and revivify becomes more and more our one ground of hope.

THE C.N-L. AS A CHRISTMAS GIFT

We do not propose this year to issue a Christmas number of the News-Letter as a special feature. But we believe that many of our members will want, as in the past, to make a subscription to the News-Letter a Christmas gift to friends. A leaflet for this purpose is enclosed with the present number. For friends in this country the News-Letter of December 17th will be the most appropriate one with which to begin. The Supplement to that number will deal with the significance of the relations of persons—the same theme as that of Professor Macmurray's talks. It will attempt to show why on this question more than on any other the future of society turns. It will thus introduce new readers to what is central in the thought of the News-Letter, and both in the Supplement and in the following News-Letter of December 24th, the relation of this vital issue to the Christmas Message will be brought out.

Subscriptions for friends *abroad* should be sent immediately, to start with the next number. About a year ago a grant was made by the Phelps-Stokes Fund in America which enabled us to send the News-Letter for one year to a number of missionaries, educators and Africans in the African Continent. The letters of appreciation which have reached us show how eagerly people abroad welcome a link with Christian thought in England.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

[1] The origin of the Silent Minute Observance is explained, and suggestions made for its use, in a pamphlet *The Spiritual Front* (Andrew Dakers, Ltd., 42 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1, 3d.).

Subscriptions—The rate of subscription to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months. Back numbers—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies. Post free.

Bound Volumes—Volume I (Nos. 0-26), Volume II (Nos. 27-52), Volume III (Nos. 53-78). Uniformly bound in green cloth with gold lettering and index, 8s. 6d. each, post free. Volume IV (Nos. 79-104) will be on sale in a few weeks' time.

Members' Copies for Binding—26 issues (Nos. 0-26 ; 27-52 ; 53-78 ; 79-104) bound in dark green board with black lettering, and appropriate index included : 2s. 6d. each volume, post free. Please send all binding orders by December 1st.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

21, NORTHMOOR ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.